

U.S. Forces Converge as the

Whether the president ordered air, amphibious, or airborne attacks against Cuba, global measures against the Soviet Union, nonhostile activities, or a combination of actions, U.S. naval forces would be vital. Consequently, the Navy reorganized its command team. On 17 October, CNO directed Admiral Dennison to put Vice Admiral Alfred G. "Corky" Ward in charge of the Second Fleet. Dennison also ordered Vice Admiral Horacio Rivero, Jr., to fill Ward's former billet as Commander Amphibious Forces, Atlantic Fleet. Dennison, who not only commanded the unified Atlantic Command but its naval component, the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, also continued to deploy ship and aircraft units into the Atlantic and the Caribbean.

Enterprise, with Carrier Air Group 6 embarked, sortied from Norfolk on 19 October. Navy spokesmen stated that she sailed to escape the effects of approaching Hurricane Ella, but the press was skeptical because no other ships left port at the same time. *Enterprise* stood out for the waters north of the Bahamas. Over the next three days, radar picket destroyers *William R. Rush* (DDR 714), *Hawkins* (DDR 873), and *Fiske* (DDR 842) left Mayport, Florida, to join the carrier as escorts.

On 20 October, the Navy formed Task Force 135, which was composed of the *Enterprise* and *Independence*

task groups, an underway replenishment group, shore-based Fleet Air Wing 11, and Marine Aircraft Group 32 stationed at NS Roosevelt Roads. That same day Dennison ordered the A3J heavy attack aircraft of Carrier Air Group 6 to remain ashore. To replace them, twenty Marine A4D Skyhawks from Marine Attack Squadron 225 flew out to the Task Force 135 carriers. The latter aircraft, light attack jets, were better suited to close air support strikes than the A3Js. Commander Second Fleet also deployed alerted squadrons from two carrier air groups in the Jacksonville area.

To help deter Khrushchev from launching a surprise attack on the United States, or if that failed, to unleash nuclear devastation on the Soviet Union, the Joint Chiefs of Staff alerted American strategic forces. These included SAC bombers and ICBMs of the Air Force and the ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) of the Navy. By mid-October, six of the Navy's new Polaris submarines, based at Holy Loch, Scotland, had deployed to their battle stations deep under the sea. *Abraham Lincoln* (SSBN 602), in upkeep at Holy Loch, and two other submarines that had just completed shakedown cruises were also prepared on short notice to add their firepower to the nuclear equation.

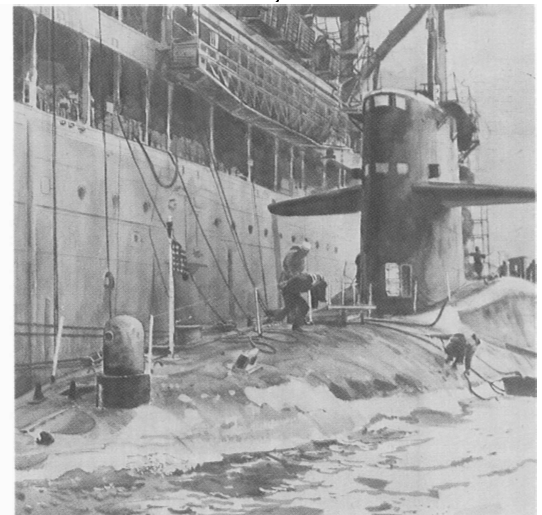
Other units of the Air Force and the Army based throughout the continental

United States moved toward their staging areas and prepared to fulfill the roles assigned them in contingency plans. Several aircraft wings of the Air Force's TAC flew to Tyndall, McCoy, and Homestead Air Force Bases in Florida. The Air Defense Command also moved F-104 interceptors to Key West. The Army placed in readiness for immediate deployment the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. The 1st and 2nd Infantry Divisions prepared for action, and the 1st Armored Division's Task Force Charlie started moving to its embarkation point, Savannah, Georgia. The Army also ordered Hawk missile battalions and anti-aircraft automatic weapons battalions to southern Florida to defend air bases there.

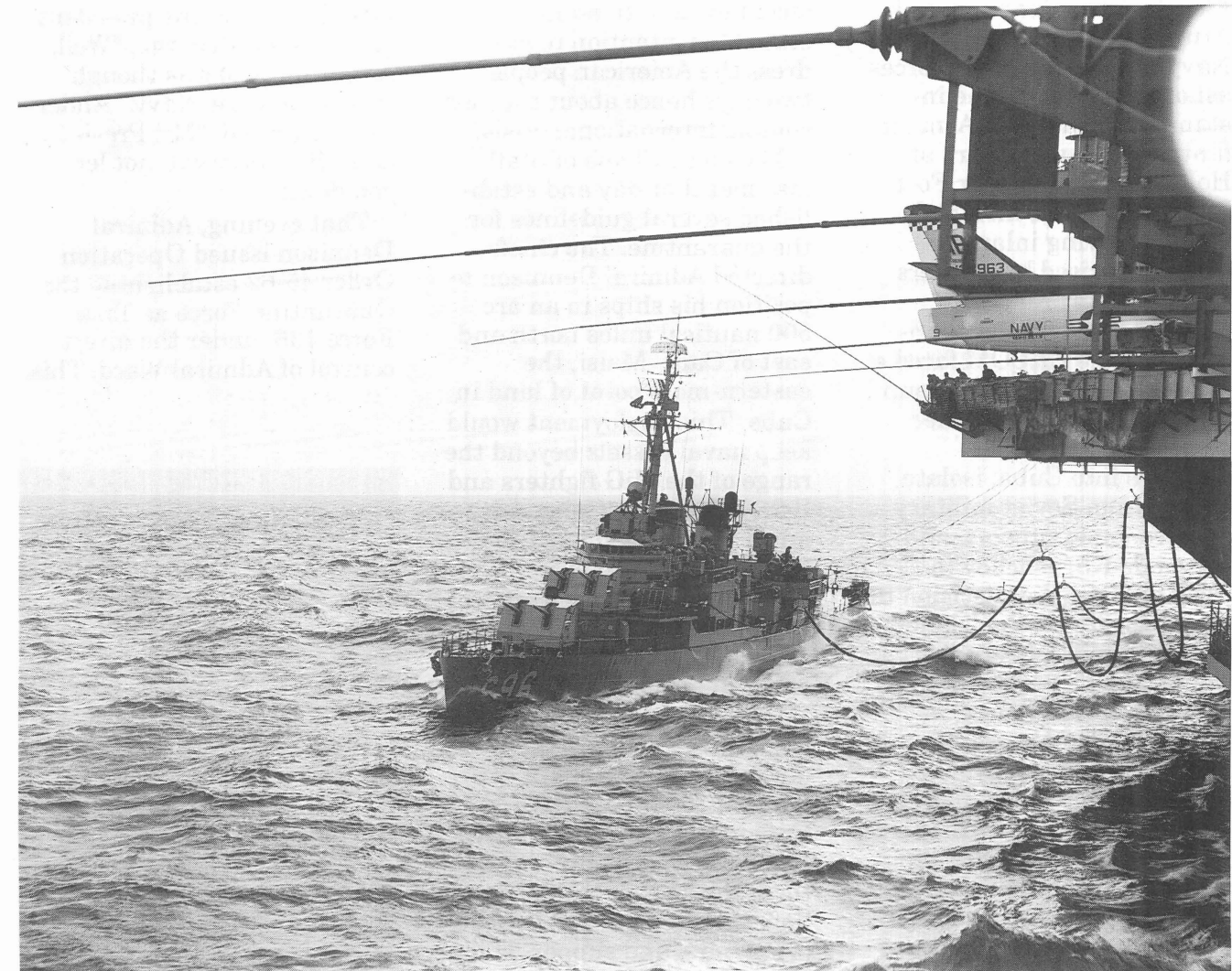
Marine Corps units also

"USS *Proteus*," watercolor by George Gray. A submarine tender provides alongside support to a Polaris fleet ballistic missile submarine at Holy Loch, Scotland.

Navy Art Collection #470



Crisis Unfolds



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prepared to implement the Cuba contingency plans. On the East Coast, II Marine Expeditionary Force, under command of Major General Frederick L. Weiseman, got ready to embark in the ships of Amphibious Group 4. This force included four BLTs and armored and antitank support units of the 2nd Marine Division and Marine Aircraft

Group 26. On the West Coast, the Marine Corps ordered the activation of the Fifth Marine Expeditionary Brigade. Composed of four battalions from the 1st Marine Division, this brigade would embark in the ships of Amphibious Group 3 which would then transit the Panama Canal into the Caribbean Sea. Additional Marine aviation and support units

As they steam toward the Caribbean hot spot, the destroyer *English* (DD 696) takes on fuel from the aircraft carrier *Independence* (CVA 62). By this method of resupply, called underway replenishment, smaller ships of the fleet were able to remain on station throughout the crisis. Tankers also fueled ships at sea.

readied themselves for Cuban operations.

To prepare for an invasion of Cuba, if that became necessary, the services held a num-

ber of landing exercises in Florida. In conjunction with Army and Marine units, the Navy practiced putting forces ashore in Cuba. In one instance, Marines and Army infantrymen came ashore at Hollywood Beach near Fort Lauderdale. The men had trouble moving inland because surprised beachgoers thronged the area.

On 20 October, the president and the EXCOM faced a complex problem. The group wanted to prevent further shipment of offensive weapons into Cuba, isolate Castro from Soviet military and economic support, and persuade Khrushchev to reverse his earlier decision to base missiles on the island. As so often in modern international crises, sea power provided a solution—a naval blockade. The Navy's submarines, surface warships, and patrol aircraft could execute that mission without firing a shot. Moreover, no government's permission was required to deploy a powerful U.S. fleet into the Atlantic or the Caribbean to establish a naval cordon around the island of Cuba.

That same day, the president ordered the Navy to stop and search any ship suspected of transporting offensive weapons into Cuba. On the recommendation of his advisors, however, he labeled the operation a "quarantine," because a blockade is an act of war in international law. Kennedy directed the State Department to inform

America's closest allies of the recent events. In addition, he stated his intention to address the American people two days hence about the blossoming international crisis.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also met that day and established several guidelines for the quarantine. The chiefs directed Admiral Dennison to position his ships in an arc 500 nautical miles north and east of Cape Maisi, the eastern-most point of land in Cuba. This deployment would keep naval vessels beyond the range of the MiG fighters and Il-28 bombers in Cuba. Admiral Ward codenamed this line "Walnut."

As these decisions were made, Destroyer Squadron 16, based at Mayport, canceled all leave and alerted sailors to return to their ships. Over the next three days, *Bigelow* (DD 942), *William C. Lawe* (DD 763), *McCaffery* (DD 860), and *Forrest Royal* (DD 872) left port for their stations on the "Walnut" line. Cruisers, other destroyers, and support ships sailed from the naval bases at Norfolk; Charleston, South Carolina; and Newport, Rhode Island.

On the 21st, Admiral Anderson briefed the EXCOM on his operational concept for the quarantine. He explained in great detail how U.S. warships would locate, signal, and if necessary use force against suspect ships refusing inspection. To improve communication, he had dispatched Russian linguists to

the quarantine force. As the meeting closed, the president gave CNO his charge: "Well, Admiral it looks as though this is up to the Navy." Anderson responded, "Mr. President, the Navy will not let you down."

That evening, Admiral Dennison issued Operation Order 45-62 establishing the Quarantine Force as Task Force 136, under the direct control of Admiral Ward. This



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RAdm. Edward J. O'Donnell, commander of the naval base at Guantanamo, briefs Chief of Naval Operations **Adm. George W. Anderson** on the defensive strengths and weaknesses of his Navy-Marine garrison.